United Nations E/CN.6/2012/3

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 December 2011

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The report provides an overview of the situation of women and girls in rural areas, examines the global context and points out how advancing rural women's and girls' empowerment contributes to rural development and food security. It discusses rural women's access to resources (land, finance, extension, information and technology) and markets, employment and decent work, and social protection. It discusses their contribution to unpaid care work, how service provision can reduce the burden of such work, and their role in sustainable development. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-63149 (E) 130112

Please recycle

Contents

		Page
I.	Introduction	3
II.	The situation of women in rural areas	3
III.	Neglect of agriculture and the food crisis	6
IV.	Access to productive resources and markets	8
V.	Rural employment and decent work	11
VI.	Unpaid care work and access to services	14
VII.	Sustainable development	16
VIII.	Conclusions and recommendations	17

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15, the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-sixth session will consider as its priority theme "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges". The present report covers the economic empowerment of rural women and another report (E/CN.6/2012/4) addresses gender-responsive governance systems and institutions. The report on women's economic empowerment (E/CN.6/2012/10) examines the macroeconomic policy environment and analyses the situation of women as workers and decision makers. It is recommended that the three reports be read together for a full overview of challenges faced by rural women.

2. The present report draws on the findings of the expert group meeting on "Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation", organized by UN-Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), held from 20 to 23 September 2011 in Accra. It incorporates analysis and examples provided by Member States and United Nations entities.[1] It concludes with recommendations for the Commission to consider.

II. The situation of women in rural areas

3. Agriculture provides a livelihood for 86 per cent of rural women and men and employment for about 1.3 billion smallholder farmers and landless workers in developing countries;[2] 43 per cent of them are women.[3] Women are active in all agricultural sectors and much of their work is unpaid. In developing countries, rural women are primarily responsible for cultivating food crops and vegetables and managing small animals (see A/66/181, para. 13). In 2008, women represented approximately 12 per cent of the labour force in the fishery sector,[3] primarily concentrated in subsistence and small-scale commercial fishing but also in artisanal and industrial fisheries at the processing and marketing stages. In forestry, women tend to work in low-end jobs and they contribute to agroforestry, watershed management, tree improvement, forest protection and management within their communities. An estimated two thirds of the 400 million poor livestock keepers worldwide are women.[4]

---

[1] Contributions were received from the Governments of Cameroon, Colombia, Denmark, Djibouti, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mauritius, New Zealand, Serbia, South Africa, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Timor-Leste and Ukraine. The following United Nations entities provided inputs: the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, FAO, IFAD, the International Labour Office (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

[2] www.fao-ilo.org/ilo-dec-employ/en/?no_cache=1.

[3] www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e02.pdf.

[4] FAO, "The role of women in agriculture", ESA Working Paper No. 11-02, March 2011.

4. Rural women and men are generally involved in multiple activities simultaneously — smallholder farming, agricultural and non-agricultural wage labour and self-employment — to secure their livelihoods. They may have to change jobs, depending on the season, or may remain unemployed or underemployed for periods of time.[5] Income from non-farm activities accounts for approximately 42 per cent of household income in Africa, 40 per cent in Latin America and 32 per cent in Asia.[6]

5. Poverty remains a massive and predominantly rural phenomenon; 70 per cent of the developing world's 1.4 billion extremely poor live in rural areas. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to nearly a third of that number, while South Asia is now home to about half.[7] In the recently enlarged European Union, more than half of the population lives in rural areas and in some countries poverty is predominantly rural. In Albania, for example, almost 90 per cent of the poor live in rural areas. In Canada and the United States of America, 14 per cent of the rural population is poor, the most vulnerable being female-headed households, children and ethnic minorities.[8]

6. Global and regional data show serious urban/rural discrepancies as a result of poor service delivery in rural areas and rural underdevelopment. Rural women's heavy workload on the farm and in the household limits their time and energy for tending to children and for preparing nutritious family meals and weaning foods.[9] In developing regions, child malnutrition is twice as common in rural areas as in urban areas; children under five are more at risk of dying in rural than in urban households; and rural children are twice as likely to be out of school compared to urban children, with a wider gender gap in rural areas. Eight out of 10 people without access to an improved drinking water source live in rural areas.[10]

7. Maternal mortality is the highest where the numbers of skilled health personnel are the lowest — in rural sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Oceania, particularly in poorer and less educated communities.[10] About 1,000 women die from pregnancy- or childbirth-related complications around the world every day and 99 per cent of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries. Women giving birth in urban areas are twice as likely to be attended by skilled health workers as women in rural areas.[11]

8. Rural women are not a homogeneous group and their circumstances vary according to their access to productive assets, their capabilities, their opportunities and the extent to which they have a voice. For instance, HIV/AIDS-affected rural communities are usually composed of larger numbers of sick adults and orphans and vulnerable children, which disproportionately increases the burden of care for rural women and girls. The dramatic labour force shortage in such communities threatens agricultural production, rural livelihoods and food security and puts more pressure

---

[5] FAO, IFAD and ILO, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty: Status, Trends and Gaps* (Rome, 2010).

[6] FAO, *Promoting Farm/Non-farm Linkages in Developing Countries: Case Studies from Africa and Latin America* (Rome, 2002).

[7] IFAD, *Rural Poverty Report 2011* (Rome, 2010).

[8] www.ruralpovertyportal.org.

[9] N.O. Onofiok and D.O. Nnanyelugo, "Weaning foods in West Africa: nutritional problems and possible solutions", *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1998.

[10] United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report*, 2010 and 2011.

[11] United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2009*.

on women's and girls' time. Rural widows are at a greater risk of losing their productive assets, such as land. Minority women or lower-caste or lower-class women usually have even less access than other rural women to health care, education and decision-making power. FAO data for 20 countries show that rural female-headed households tend to be poorer than male-headed households. However, rural women heads of household who receive male support through remittances or social networks are better off.

9. Women living in remote areas are isolated by their lack of access to public transport, communication technologies, information and institutions. Extreme weather conditions, poor road infrastructure, tight seasonal work schedules and gender norms may limit their physical mobility. They may lack the support system necessary to obtain immediate assistance when their rights are violated, for instance in abusive relationships. They may stay home to ensure the safety of the livestock and other household assets. While they carry out most of the community management roles, such as organizing social events, men are more engaged in community political roles.

10. Rural women hold much of the knowledge needed to increase food security, prevent environmental degradation and maintain agricultural biodiversity. They are custodians and users of traditional knowledge, including on climate resilience, and managers of seeds, and often rely on native plants, including medicinal plants, and native food varieties and practices for their sustenance, health and well-being.

11. Indigenous women's livelihood strategies are closely tied to the environment and are highly dependent on access to land, territory and resources. Their cultures and knowledge systems are often closely related to their traditional occupations, for example handicrafts, community-based industries, hunting, fishing, trapping, shifting cultivation or gathering. However, there is increased pressure on their lands and resources and many indigenous peoples are fighting for their rights over ancestral domains. Food security and women's livelihoods are central to these struggles.

12. Rural girls suffer from gender-based discrimination. Rural girls face greater pressure than their urban peers to adhere to traditional practices and customs. Early marriage and early pregnancy limit their social networks and education opportunities and expose them to greater reproductive health risks. In rural areas of the developing world, excluding China, 45 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 are married or in unions before the age of 18, compared to 22 per cent of urban women. The unpaid work burden for rural girls is especially heavy.

13. The situation of women in rural areas is challenging. While they can increase their autonomy and power within their fam lies and communities through a variety of means — education, an independent income, new responsibilities following the migration of a spouse, asset inheritance and participation in community decision-making processes — their opportunities are always limited by the broader development context and sometimes by specific local factors, such as isolation and remoteness (for further discussion of women's collective action and participation in decision-making processes, see E/CN.6/2012/4).

III. Neglect of agriculture and the food crisis

14. The primary factors constraining women's economic empowerment are structural and deeply rooted. They include the global context of agricultural production and trade, emerging global demographic trends, increased competition for natural resources, and national agricultural and rural development policies. In many developing countries, investment in the production of agricultural exports has dominated agricultural policies to the detriment of investment in production for local markets.

15. Volatile food prices, increased competition for resources, climate change and environmental degradation are deleterious for both developing and industrialized countries. The least developed countries are usually unable to afford insurance and other measures that mitigate price- or weather-related shocks. Slow recovery from the financial and economic crisis is impeding rural development in many countries and threatening economic development, political stability, peace and security around the world. The latest severe drought and famine in the Horn of Africa highlight the urgent need to address the underlying causes of the food crisis.

16. According to FAO, in 2010, 925 million people were chronically hungry; of them, 60 per cent were women (E/2007/71, para. 14).[1] Major spikes in the prices of rice, wheat and maize in 2008 led to large increases in the number of people going hungry and falling into poverty. Between 130 million and 155 million people in developing countries fell into extreme poverty in 2007 and 2008 owing to the food and fuel price hikes.[12] Food price volatility has a disproportionate impact on poor consumers and on poor smallholder farmers, the majority of whom are women, who are less likely to invest in measures to raise productivity during periods of unpredictable price changes.[13]

17. Food security can be enhanced if gender inequalities are systematically addressed in rural development and agricultural policies. FAO estimates that the productivity gains from ensuring women's equal access to fertilizers, seeds and tools could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by an estimated 2.5 to 4 per cent, thereby reducing the number of hungry people by between 100 million and 150 million.[14]

18. International prices for most agricultural commodities are predicted to remain at 2010 levels or higher at least for the next decade, making it more difficult to achieve global food security and nutrition goals.[15] Targeted safety-net mechanisms and emergency food reserves can reduce the negative consequences of high prices for poor women and men, and collective action can help smallholder farmers benefit from them.

19. Agricultural growth, especially of smallholder agriculture, contributes to improved food security and benefits people with low incomes, who spend a large proportion of their income on food. It can contribute to the eradication of hunger, to

---

[12] International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects 2009: commodities at the Crossroads* (Washington, D.C., 2009).

[13] FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2011: How does International Price Volatility affect Domestic Economies and Food Security?* (Rome, 2011).

[14] FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11: Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development* (Rome, 2011).

[15] *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2011-2020.*

rural development and to gender equality and the empowerment of women.[16] It is estimated that gross domestic product (GDP) growth founded on agriculture is at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as GDP growth originating from outside agriculture.[17] Agricultural growth in many countries has suffered as a result of years of policy neglect and underinvestment.

20. The renewed international attention, including from new constituencies, to the agricultural sector provides an opportunity to increase recognition of and support to rural women and girls. In 2003, in the African Union Declaration on Food Security in Africa, African Heads of State and Government committed themselves to allocating at least 10 per cent of their national budgets to agricultural development. In 2009, the G8 Summit adopted the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative and mobilized pledges of over US$ 22 billion to reverse the decline of investment in agriculture and improve food security.[18] The international community contributed US$ 7.5 billion in official development assistance to rural development and the agricultural sector in 2008 and 2009. However, the focus on gender equality and women's empowerment remains limited. According to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee data, only 3 per cent of that amount was allocated to programmes in which gender equality was a principal objective, and only 32 per cent to those in which gender equality was a secondary objective.

21. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, provides another opportunity to strengthen attention to rural women's and girls' contributions to sustainable development and to increase their engagement in policymaking processes. Climate finance offers further opportunities to support rural women's food production systems. At the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in December 2009, industrialized countries pledged US$ 30 billion for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change for the period 2010-2012 and committed themselves to mobilizing long-term finance of a further US$ 100 billion annually by 2020.[19]

22. The World Trade Organization trade negotiations on agriculture provide a forum for the discussion of issues such as market access, the elimination of export and domestic subsidies, tariffs and non-tariff barriers, and special and differential treatment for developing countries. Following the failure of the Uruguay Round to reach an agreement on these issues, the 2001 Doha Round provided avenues for addressing rural development and food security concerns of developing countries.

23. Empowering rural women and girls is an essential part of the solution to some of today's most serious global challenges: food security, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Their agency is critical to secure higher rates of agricultural growth and enhanced food security, reduce the intergenerational

[16] World Bank, *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* (Washington, D.C., 2007); and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (A/CONF.219/3/Rev.1).

[17] World Bank, *World Development Report 2008*, op. cit.

[18] *Musjoka Accountability Report: Assessing Action and Results against Development-related Commitments*, 2010.

[19] http://unfccc.int/meetings/copenhagen_dec_2009/meeting/6295.php.

transmission of poverty and manage land and rural resources in a sustainable manner.

IV. Access to productive resources and markets

24. Securing women's legal rights to land and other property and access to markets is an indispensable component of their economic empowerment and often the basis for sustainable food production. Global data illustrate that women have equal property ownership rights in 115 countries and have equal inheritance rights in 93 countries.[20] However, gender disparities in land holdings are discernible in all regions. When women do have access to land, through marriage, inheritance, land reform programmes and land markets, it is often of poorer quality than the land that men have access to and control.[21] Cultural norms and traditions and discriminatory formal and informal laws often restrict, exclude or unfavourably affect rural women's access to and control over land, finance, extension services, information and new technologies.[22] In some countries, Government policies and legislative reforms concerning inheritance and marriage can increase women's ability to gain access to and control resources.

25. In many countries, common grazing lands, forests and rivers are of significant value to poorer households and indigenous groups, in particular women, who rely on them for fuel, food, fodder and as sources of income.[23] While both women and men have user rights, control often remains with senior men in the community. Women's limited access to land means that they tend to own fewer and smaller animals. While women are as successful as men in generating income from animals, as food production becomes commercialized, decisions and income tend to shift to men, and women's small-scale businesses are crowded out and women may be forced to take employment on other farmers' land.

26. Increased competition for resources, partly stemming from a growing market for land and urban expansion, has had an adverse impact on developing countries. Where governance is poor and legal protection for local communities and smallholder farmers is weak, women are subject to discrimination. Land acquisitions by domestic and foreign investors, in particular in Africa and South-East Asia, have increased demand for water, and the pollution of surface and groundwater has created imbalances between biofuel and food production and restricted the land available to local communities for food production.

27. The ability to access land has direct consequences for the welfare and development of many children living in rural areas, whose food security and nutrition are often dependent on it. In some developing countries there is evidence that the nutrition of smaller children, as they transition from breast milk to solid foods, is particularly dependent on women's and girls' time availability and can suffer when the demand for agricultural labour is high. In countries where women

[20] UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2011-12: In Pursuit of Justice*.

[21] *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11*, op. cit.

[22] See OECD, "Gender inequality and the MDGs: what are the missing dimensions?", September 2010.

[23] United Nations, *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women's Control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources, including Microfinance* (New York, 2009).

lack land ownership rights or access to credit there are, on average, 60 per cent and 85 per cent more malnourished children, respectively.[24]

28. Land reform can address gender inequalities in land and property holdings and progress has been made in ensuring that women have equal rights.[25] Government capacity at the local and national levels needs to be built up to strengthen existing laws, introduce new reforms and strengthen implementation. Public officials posted to remote rural areas may be unaware of the laws and their duties to implement them. Rural women and men often have limited awareness of their rights and limited access to legal aid and appeal mechanisms, which prevents them from exercising their rights.

29. Countries in southern Africa have improved land administration by recruiting more women and by decentralizing law enforcement offices, making them more accessible to poor women and men.[26] Putting women into leadership positions in Tajikistan increased women's registrations of dekhan farms from 2 to 14 per cent between 2002 and 2008.

30. National land titling can help secure women's rights when registration requires women to register their titles alone or when both spouses' names are required. For example, in India stamp duty rates were cut from 8 to 6 per cent for property registered by women and to 7 per cent for property jointly registered by husband and wife (A/64/93, para. 194). However, titling can also formalize inequality by fixing land distributions where they were earlier flexible and negotiable through customary law.[25] In Africa, land-titling projects have led to the individualization of rights to land, trees and water and, as a result, the exclusion of those who previously had user rights through customary law, often poor women (ibid., para. 191).

31. Access to financial services (credit, savings, insurance and remittance transfer services) is critical for rural women's economic empowerment. However, women have less access to financial services than men. For example, in rural sub-Saharan Africa, women hold less than 10 per cent of the credit available to smallholder agriculture. A number of institutional and socio-economic and cultural barriers — lack of collateral, limited financial skills and time, limited mobility and access to transportation — restrict women's access to financial services. In parts of South Asia, landless women have been able to lease or purchase land as groups for joint cultivation as a result of targeted credit subsidies by Governments.

32. Microfinance institutions have increased women's access to finance and are developing approaches to meet the specific needs of rural women. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh makes long-term loans for land and housing conditional on their registration in the woman's name, leading to improved security for women, decreased divorce and abandonment of women, and improved repayment rates. A microfinance programme supporting women's savings and credit groups in northern Mozambique is built on the local tradition of saving to overcome gender barriers to microfinance. An IFAD-supported savings scheme in Peru targeted groups of rural

[24] OECD, "Gender inequality and the MDGs", op. cit.

[25] Rao Nitya, "Women's access to land: an Asian perspective", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on "Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation", Accra, 20-23 September 2011.

[26] International Land Coalition and Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, "Securing women's access to land: linking research and action. An overview of action-research projects in Southern Africa", Synthesis Report No. 15, March 2011.

women, provided them with financial education and training, and matched their savings over four years with grants. The response was vast, with 5,000 more accounts opened than expected. Innovative financial literacy tools for business plans and loans have been developed and are being used by women's groups in India, the Sudan and Uganda.[27]

33. Advances in technology, such as computerized services, automated teller machines (ATMs), and mobile banking, make financial service delivery less dependent on expensive infrastructure and facilitate reaching rural and remote areas. In Brazil, India, Kenya, the Philippines and South Africa, financial institutions have reached rural women customers at a low cost by providing their services through post offices, petrol stations and stores.[28] Ekgaon Technologies has created an innovative platform to enable rural women in Tamil Nadu, India, to access financial information and services from the Government and national banks through Short Message Service (SMS) mobile banking.

34. Agriculture extension services provide information about new technologies, plant varieties and market opportunities, usually for commercially marketed crops. Current data show that only 5 per cent of agricultural extension services are provided to women farmers.[29] There is a large unmet demand for extension services that respond to women farmers' needs, for example on locally used and marketed crops like millet, cassava and sorghum. Targeting client services to women farmers in Nicaragua led to a 600 per cent increase in women service users. Extension services also need to encompass indigenous and traditional agricultural and biotechnical knowledge and new technologies. Many poor women have complex practical understanding of agro-biodiversity, fisheries, horticulture, forestry and health.[30]

35. Woman-to-woman training has boosted both subsistence production and household food security in Honduras. Women's active engagement in cooperatives, seed banks and seed exchange fairs has contributed to increased food security in many communities. For example, a Nepalese farmers' organization with 90 per cent women members was established in response to the rapid decline in local rice varieties. Since 2003, it has established a seed storage facility where it conserves 80 traditional varieties of rice.[31] The effective introduction and uptake of new technologies require women's participation at the early stages of technology development and local adaptation. Moroccan women's participation in the improvement of olive oil technology and production methods boosted their production and earnings.

36. Promoting women's access to processing facilities, distribution and transport has proved successful in a number of countries. It has helped women tomato farmers in South Africa to produce and sell tomato products to retail supermarkets

[27] IFAD, "Gender and rural microfinance: reaching and empowering women; a guide for practitioners", 2009.

[28] World Bank, *World Development Report 2008*, op. cit.

[29] www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit/english/fsheets/women.pdf.

[30] Report of the expert group meeting on "Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation", held from 20 to 23 September 2011 in Accra (forthcoming).

[31] UNDP, "Intellectual property, agrobiodiversity and gender considerations: issues and case studies from the Andean and South Asian regions", Policy Paper, September 2010.

throughout the country. Women's access to cassava processing equipment and enhanced access to information technology in Nigeria resulted in their increased productivity and increased market visibility and market share.

37. The spread of cost-effective information and communication technologies (ICTs) to rural areas allows women access to information to improve agricultural productivity and increase enterprise returns. In Uganda, ICTs have facilitated women farmers' interaction with other parts of the country and in Mali they have helped women market their products. Women fish processors in Benin use video, television and mobile phones to learn new fish preservation techniques and to sell their produce in Togo and Nigeria. In Italy, a web community "YOURuralNET" has allowed women farm managers to share and exchange their knowledge, experiences and good practices.

38. Despite the high food prices on the global market, small-scale producers in many countries have been unable to reap the benefits, in part owing to their limited access to markets but also to the high transaction costs typical for small economic units.[32] Agricultural cooperatives have enabled smallholder farmers to pool resources and realize economies of scale. In Tajikistan, women's producer groups have benefited from organized marketing strategies for their cashmere, wool and mohair products, access to the North American market and joint strategies for entering the European market. In some countries, through the FAO/IFAD/WFP Purchase for Progress Initiative, smallholder farmers have linked up with schools, hospitals and other public institutions and programmes to sell their produce.

39. Helping women access niche markets for high-value and brand-marketed products, including fair trade and certified organic products, expands their economic opportunities and income and responds to increased consumer demand for fresh and organic produce. Organic "women's coffee" has been successfully introduced by associations of women farmers in Rwanda. In Fiji, women are engaged in the cultivation of seaweed and pearls, and the innovative production of virgin coconut oil. In the Syrian Arab Republic, training for women has been focused on the making of perfume, cheese and other dairy products and on the use of plants for medicinal purposes.

V. Rural employment and decent work

40. The informal nature much rural employment, poor or absent work standards and rights, poor implementation of national legislation and regulations, and social institutions shape women's work in rural areas. For example, the average female to male ratio of contributing family workers is almost double in countries where women lack rights to own land, than in those where women have equal rights to land.[33] Where a relatively small share of the population works for a wage, women are less likely to do so than men and are more likely to be employed in part-time, seasonal, low-paying jobs than men. Rural women often face gender-based

[32] FAO and IFAD, *Good Practices in Building Innovative Rural Institutions to Increase Food Security* (forthcoming).

[33] J. Jütting and C. Morrisson, "Women and bad jobs, what can 'SIGI' tell us?", Paper presented at the FAO-IFAD-ILO workshop on gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty, Rome, 31 March-2 April 2009.

discrimination, including sexual harassment, and have limited to non-existent rights as pregnant women and mothers.[30]

41. Evidence suggests that women's ability to diversify away from agriculture could provide an effective pathway out of poverty in some countries.[34] Women's engagement in activities outside the farm has also proven to improve their self-esteem and self-reliance, and the respect in which they are held in the community and employment in large-scale export-oriented crop production and agro-processing may provide better working conditions and wages than traditional agricultural employment.

42. Social protection systems in some countries have contributed to safeguarding a minimum level of access to essential services and income security for all citizens, and to preventing them from falling permanently into poverty. In China, the Minimum Living Standards Scheme, initially restricted to urban areas, now covers 46 million beneficiaries in rural areas. The Government aims to achieve full rural pension coverage by 2020.[35]

43. Evidence from middle- and low-income countries shows that access to social security is closely linked to reductions in poverty and inequality. By enhancing rural women's income security and access to essential services, social protection floors can increase rural women's access to education and labour market participation.[35] Social protection floors are affordable even in severely resource-constrained countries, as shown in studies by ILO, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, UNICEF, WHO and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. A solid but modest social protection floor can grow progressively with increased levels of economic development.[36]

44. Employment guarantee and public works programmes are provided either on a permanent basis or as temporary measures in times of economic or other crisis. In India, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has provided employment in infrastructure to unskilled and unemployed women and men from 52 million rural and poor households.[37] In South Africa, it is aimed to scale up the Expanded Public Works Programme from 500,000 work opportunities in 2009 to 1.5 million in 2014. The Programme is innovative in that it also focuses on job creation in the social sector, for example in the areas of childhood development, home-based care and the upgrading of other community services.

45. Other employment creation programmes aim to help rural women gain the skills they need to obtain employment in the formal sector or to own businesses. In Peru, public competitions are used to identify successful poor women farmers for public funding and technical assistance to enable them to expand their businesses. Home-employed rural women in Uzbekistan are helped to develop marketing plans

[34] FAO, IFAD and ILO, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Development: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty. Status, Trends and Gaps* (Rome, 2010).

[35] ILO, *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization*, Report of the Social Protection Floor Advisory Group chaired by Michelle Bachelet and convened by ILO in collaboration with WHO (Geneva, 2011).

[36] Rania Antonopoulos, "Social protection: opportunities for promoting a gender equality agenda", UNDP Policy Brief (forthcoming).

[37] See additional examples in UNDP, "Employment guarantee policies", Policy Brief Issue 02, Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction Series, April 2010.

using on-line retailers and designer boutiques. In Nepal, some 34,170 women have established microenterprises as a result of UNDP-sponsored enterprise development training. A recent impact evaluation concluded that women who have participated in this training earn five times more than those who did not participate.

46. Conditional cash transfer programmes, in both rural and urban areas, respond to the increasing demand for assistance to poor families hardest hit by the global crises, and target poor and excluded groups often living outside the reach of social insurance. Conditions attached, such as regular school attendance or basic preventive health care, have the aim of halting the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Lessons learned from cash transfers to some 110 million people in Latin America are that well-designed and targeted programmes can help increase the food consumption and school enrolment of girls. In Brazil, the Bolsa Familia programme is the largest conditional cash transfer programme in the developing world, reaching over 46 million people, with 93 per cent of the payments made going to women as the legally responsible beneficiaries.[38] A joint non-governmental organization/commercial bank programme established mobile ATMs in rural areas of Malawi, allowing thousands of rural women to access cash transfers using smart cards.

47. Rural-to-urban or international migration is sometimes the only viable option for rural women. Lack of economic opportunities, cultural practices and violence against women, authoritarian systems of family and community control, and family pressures are drivers of women's migration. In middle- and high-income countries, declining birth rates, ageing populations, combined with women's increasing public employment, and lack of State-provided child and elder care, have created a demand for local or overseas migrant workers, such as domestic workers.

48. Temporary, circular or permanent migration can empower women.[39] Many migrant women, especially those in higher-skilled occupations, benefit from cultural exchange and exposure to new ideas, skills, attitudes and knowledge, and develop independence and self-confidence. Their roles as financial providers or managers of remittances have enabled many of them to enjoy greater status and decision-making power within their households and communities, transforming relationships between women and men. Male out-migration can also present opportunities for changing gender stereotypes, as women have to take on additional roles and tasks traditionally carried out by men.

49. However, migrant women face risks, discrimination, exploitation and abuse at all stages of migration. Their greater lack of access to information, education and training heighten their susceptibility to unscrupulous recruiters and traffickers, debt bondage, fewer legal and decent jobs for women, and higher social and personal costs for women returnees.[39] Working in an isolated and poorly regulated space, women domestic workers remain overworked, underpaid and unprotected, and there are widely reported cases of abuse of domestic workers. Despite these constraints, migrant women send remittances regularly and consistently remit a larger proportion of their earnings than men. For example, Bangladeshi women working in the Middle

[38] Kathy Lindert and others, "The nuts and bolts of Brazil's Bolsa Familia Program: implementing conditional cash transfers in a decentralized context", SP Discussion Paper No. 0709 (World Bank, 2007).

[39] United Nations, *2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration* (New York, 2006).

East send home 72 per cent of their earnings on average.[40] However, in their home communities, they often face social pressure and stigmatization, as migrating on their own, making independent decisions, developing networks and earning a higher income may appear inappropriate in some cultures.

50. Women also tend to be the major recipients of remittances, either because their needs are higher or because they are seen as better managers and investors in household or community well-being. Women, including poor rural women, who migrate as domestic workers often return home to start up small businesses, such as auto-rickshaw rental businesses in Nepal, tour guide businesses and diving equipment shops in the Caribbean, and small grocery stores in Africa. In the Philippines, women have been able to purchase farmland and invest in agricultural technology. However, findings suggest that most of the remitted money is spent on consumption and not necessarily for productive purposes.[41] Incentives for investment in the local economy need to be provided to remittance-receiving households by commercial banks, along with targeted financial and non-financial advice to women migrant workers.

VI. Unpaid care work and access to services

51. Much of rural women's and girls' time is spent working in unpaid activities. Gender norms and work roles prevailing in rural societies assign women and girls a wide range of responsibilities, from domestic tasks such as caring for children, collecting water and firewood, cooking meals, processing and storing food to providing unpaid work on family farms for subsistence agriculture or cash crop production. FAO reports that poor rural women can work as many as 16 to 18 hours per day, doing fieldwork as well as handling all their domestic responsibilities.[42] However, little value is placed on the unpaid care work[43] of rural women. It is usually invisible in national accounting systems and unrecognized in policymaking, planning, resource allocation and service provision.

52. The burden of unpaid care work is enormous. Globally there are 884 million people without safe drinking water, 1.6 billion people without reliable sources of energy, 1 billion people who lack access to roads, 2.6 billion people without satisfactory sanitation facilities, and 2.7 billion people who rely on open fires and traditional cooking stoves.

53. The pressure of balancing unpaid care work with agricultural production undermines the ability of rural women to engage in paid work. In rural Africa, women often walk 10 miles or more every day to fetch water and in the dry season it is not uncommon for women to walk twice that distance. Most tasks are performed manually and are physically exhausting and time consuming. Rural women and girls

[40] United Nations Population Fund, *State of World Population 2006: A Passage to Hope: Women and International Migration*, p. 29 (New York, 2006).

[41] Ralph Chami and others, *Macroeconomic Consequences of Remittances* (IMF, Washington, D.C., 2008).

[42] www.fao.org/docrep/w9990e/w9990e10.htm.

[43] Unpaid care work includes both personal and health care and care-related activities (e.g. fetching water and firewood, cooking, cleaning and washing cloths). See also UNDP, *Unpaid Care Work*, Policy Brief, Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction Series, Issue 01, October 2009.

are responsible for a disproportionate share of the household's transport but generally have less access to the available means of transport than men and boys, since they are frequently controlled by men and women's ability to pay for transportation is often limited.

54. Some 2,000 rural villages in West Africa have benefited from the creation of multifunction platforms (i.e., locally generated energy services). They have helped reduce women's daily work by two to four hours, increased women's incomes, improved education and enrolment and retention rates and increased adult literacy rates. Clean and fuel-efficient cooking stoves can reduce women's and children's domestic work burden; it is estimated that one improved stove requires 50 per cent less biomass fuel than a traditional stove.[44]

55. Women's groups in rural and remote areas are working to meet their communities' water and energy needs through renewable energy sources like solar power and biogas. In Nicaragua and Uganda, women-lead initiatives have resulted in the use of solar power for business activities, for accessing information and for extra study time for boys and girls. In Nicaragua, women have opened a restaurant serving "solar food" prepared using solar energy. The Barefoot College of India and UN-Women support rural and illiterate grandmothers to become effective and self-sufficient solar engineers.

56. Time- and labour-saving processing methods and technologies for both household and agricultural use, and nutrition and weaning education programmes can help improve the quality of family diets and traditional weaning foods. In the Philippines, such programmes led to a reduction in the prevalence of malnutrition from 64 to 42 per cent.[9]

57. The provision of parental leave and care services for children, the elderly and the sick can help parents to better balance their work and family responsibilities. The Government of Italy has given this issue a primary role in its implementation of structural and rural development policies. In New Zealand, paid parental leave has been extended to cover self-employed parents, which is particularly beneficial to rural women.

58. To address poor local service delivery, some countries have invested in women's community centres that provide comprehensive services to women. In Kyrgyzstan, Mauritius, the Republic of Moldova and Uzbekistan, these centres provide social services, support for land registration and capacity-building programmes, including for employment and small business development. In Georgia, internally displaced women and line ministries have come together to address the specific challenges faced by those women in a comprehensive manner.

59. Services provided by mobile units can provide access for hard to reach rural populations. Mobile health units are used to respond in emergency and humanitarian situations and also to reach seasonal field workers. In the Donetsk province of Ukraine, a network of family planning services with 10 clinics and 17 mobile advisory units has helped address the reproductive health-care needs of rural women.

[44] Global Village Energy Partnership International, *Cookstoves and Markets: Experiences, Successes and Opportunities* (2009).

60. Solutions to combat women's illiteracy and children's school drop-out include targeted literacy and non-formal education opportunities in Bedouin villages in Jordan and rural villages in Cambodia, and the use of mobile phones in Pakistan. UNESCO is working with teachers to build up their basic information and communications technology skills and information literacy in South Africa in order to service rural areas better. IFAD has developed an inter-household mentoring programme in Uganda that targets poorer rural households. Single mothers in rural Timor-Leste were provided with subsidies through the Bolsa da Mãe (mother's purse) programme, enabling them to send their children to school.

VII. Sustainable development

61. Climate change, environmental degradation and climate shocks, including drought, desertification, deforestation, natural disasters, toxic waste and pollution, have contributed to the additional strains faced by women and men smallholder farmers and have exacerbated food insecurity.

62. Rural women are powerful agents and participants in sustainable development who can implement sustainable solutions to address the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. For example, women in Fiji are adopting new eco-friendly farming methods and women in Kenya and Zimbabwe are protecting and planting indigenous and medicinal trees, and establishing bee populations in arid areas and learning how to maintain them sustainably. Women in Benin have adopted environmentally sustainable methods of oyster harvesting while reforesting a lagoon on which communities depend for their livelihoods. In Ecuador, UN-Women works with indigenous women's groups to ensure their involvement in the sustainable conservation and management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve.

63. Rural women and men have the potential to contribute fully and substantively to natural resource and environmental management, conservation, protection and rehabilitation, as leaders and participants in policy formulation and decision-making institutions. They have much to contribute to designing and implementing rural infrastructure investments, for example in public transportation, water and sanitation, renewable energy and locally developed or adapted environmentally sound "green" technologies. For example, in Nepal, the Women's Environment Preservation Committee manages 963 tons of waste per year that supports 40 waste-fed biogas plants to meet local communities' demand for renewable energy.

64. The current system for promoting sustainable development is fragmented at all levels and requires immediate institutional reform to promote enhanced policy coherence and coordination in the areas of social and economic development and environmental protection, the prioritization of financial resources towards poverty reduction, equality and rural development, and the effective implementation and scaling-up of good practices. Rural women and men should be at the centre of a pro-poor and inclusive reform process.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

65. **Policy frameworks at the national level need to be redefined to provide an enabling environment with the right incentives for rural development. Global decision-making forums, including international trade machinery and other international frameworks for global policymaking and coordination, need to provide the wider policy environment to support those national policy frameworks. Countries, especially the least developed countries, need protection from the adverse consequences of global shocks and crises.**

66. **Rural women's and girls' work contributes to agricultural output, food security and rural development and so to national economic growth and development. Their mainly unpaid labour services are essential to ensure that children, the elderly and the vulnerable are nurtured and cared for. The returns from their paid and unpaid work in rural settings are a critical determinant of the intergenerational transmission of poverty.**

67. **Rural women and girls face gender-specific constraints, for example lack of access to productive resources, such as land, finance, information, extension services and technology. Cultural norms, care responsibilities and security issues mean that women and girls face more difficulties than their male counterparts in gaining access to local and national markets and institutions. Inadequate investment in the provision of services to rural areas constrains women's productivity in agriculture, exacerbates their burden of unpaid care work and limits their opportunities to earn independent incomes.**

68. **Rural development and agricultural growth are thus constrained by the inability of women and girls to fully realize their potential as economic agents in the paid and unpaid economies. For the least developed countries, it is important that pledges made at L'Aquila are honoured and that gender analysis is applied in the allocation of aid.**

69. **It is clear that women's agency is part of the solution in overcoming development challenges, including in regard to poverty, food security and environmental sustainability. But in order for that to happen, and to be sustained, rural women's and girls' leadership needs to be supported and resourced. Further, the structural factors that deepen inequalities between rural women and men need to be addressed and action taken to eliminate the discrimination faced by rural women.**

70. **Member States, United Nations entities and civil society, including women's groups and rural organizations and the private sector, have taken measures to improve rural women's and girls' access to productive inputs and services. They have taken steps to recognize and reduce women's burden of unpaid care work and to promote farm and off-farm employment, market opportunities and sustainable development.**

71. **Fully funded, coherent, systematic and strategic policies for rural women's and girls' economic empowerment are needed, instead of the ad hoc approaches that often typify current policies.**

72. **The Commission on the Status of Women may wish to call on Governments and other stakeholders to compile and share examples of good practice and lessons learned in promoting gender equality and women's**

economic empowerment in rural areas, with a view to replicating and scaling up successes, and, as appropriate, to take action as follows:

Food security and investment in agriculture

(a) To ensure that rural women are central to discussions on and equal beneficiaries of current and future financial pledges and allocations for agriculture, rural development and improved food security, and to consider earmarking resources for rural women's economic empowerment;

(b) To invest in improvements to subsistence farming, while expanding women smallholder farmers' opportunities to diversify their production and increase their productivity by engaging in commercial farming and accessing wider and more lucrative high-value product markets;

Access to resources, employment opportunities and markets

(c) To expand opportunities for wage employment, both on- and off-farm, for landless and land-poor women and men;

(d) To establish a minimum social protection floor to secure rural women's access to essential services and income security;

(e) To eliminate all discrimination against rural women and girls under statutory law, including in relation to land and natural resources, family and marriage law, inheritance provisions and housing law, and to raise awareness on rural women's rights;

(f) To develop registration processes for land tenure that are local, inexpensive, rapid, transparent and accessible to women;

(g) To increase rural women's access to financial services, including by designing targeted financial products and providing access to financial literacy training;

(h) To support women smallholder farmers by providing them with agricultural extension services, grain storage, infrastructure, transportation, information and technologies, and access to agricultural inputs;

(i) To develop well-functioning markets through transparent information, fair prices, sound infrastructure and proper regulation, and to provide remote access to up-to-date market pricing information;

(j) To develop innovative partnerships to accelerate women farmers' engagement in value chains and to help bring their products closer to national and international markets;

(k) To take advantage of technological innovations to facilitate rural women's access to information, services and means of communication, and to promote the development of village-based knowledge centres;

Unpaid care work and access to services

(l) To reduce the burden of women's unpaid care work by providing improved infrastructure, labour-saving technologies and care services for children, the elderly and the vulnerable in rural areas;

(m) To put in place adequate methodologies and data collection systems for analysing the unpaid business/farming work and the unpaid care work of rural women, and for addressing their impact;

(n) To promote rural women's and girls' access to maternal health services, and to education and training, including through establishing mandatory school programmes, local facilities, scholarships and mentorship programmes, as well as early child development programmes and child-care facilities;

Sustainable development

(o) To invest in rural women engaged in promoting sustainable agriculture and biodiversity, and in community-based renewable energy technologies in rural and remote areas;

(p) To integrate the perspectives of rural women into the preparations for, outcomes of and follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in order to accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in rural areas.